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ABSTRACT

To find ways to reduce, violence in schools, the subtle environmental aspects in a school that had integrated peace activities in the curriculum as a means of promoting positive changes in behavior were investigated. The results are presented here. At Peaceable Magnet School 42 kindergarten through eighth grade teachers were trained in peer mediation, and peace activities were initiated in the school. Afterwards, a task group was formed to immerse the whole school in violence prevention by integrating peace activities as a part of the ongoing curriculum. Researchers then compared what the teachers believed were vital factors in developing a peaceful school environment to the school environment in which they actually taught. Although the school had been focusing on peace for a year and teachers and students reported improved behavior, the teachers perceived a lack of support, and they believed that serious concerns still existed. Teacher were reluctant to involve parents as partners due to student behavior problems and from a fear of being blamed. The resounding theme resulting from the research was the grave concern that teachers still had about student behavior even after concentrated efforts to promote peace. (RJM)

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Promoting Peace in a Place Called School

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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PROMOTING PEACE IN A PLACE CALLED SCHOOL

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to investigate subtle aspects of the school environment in a city school, where teachers and students had previously implemented activities to increase awareness of peace as a means of promoting a change in behavior. Results of the *School Level Environmental Questionnaire* (SLEQ) (Fisher & Fraser, 1991) indicated that teachers wanted more student support, more resources, and less work pressure. Teachers chose the area of student support to focus on in developing action plans. An interview of the assistant principal provided perspective on progress made after implementing the action plans.

KEY WORDS: character education, safe school environment, school improvement, student behavior, values education, violence prevention,

It has been well established that many violent acts take place within the school environment. Approximately 11% of all crimes occur in our public schools, one taking place every six seconds. Eleven percent is reported, it is a conservative estimate due to the many school crimes that are unreported and treated as disciplinary incidents (Sautter, 1995). Violence is not isolated to city schools. Rural and urban schools are about equally victimized resulting in almost three million crimes occurring on or near school property each year, with violence being the second leading cause of death for America's students (Bey & Turner, 1996; Levine & Rosich, 1996; United States Justice Department, 1991). Not only are eductors concerned, students are gravely affected by violence in schools. According to the National Education Association, approximately 160,000 students fail to attend school on any given day because of fear of violence in or on the way to school (Sautter, 1995).

1. Purpose

The purpose of this comparative study was to investigate subtle aspects of the school environment in a city school, where teachers and students had previously implemented activities to increase awareness of peace as a means of promoting a change in behavior. After several teachers and students at Peaceable Magnet School had been trained in peer mediation and initiated peace activities in observance of Violence Prevention Week, a task group was formed to immerse the whole school by integrating peace activities as a part of the ongoing curriculum. The researcher's objective was to compare what Peaceable Magnet School teachers believed were vital factors in developing a peaceful school environment to the school environment they actually taught in.

2. Perspectives

The effects of this culture of violence on our children is tragic. Children need to feel safe. Children who do not feel safe are at risk of becoming traumatized as victims or becoming perpetrators themselves (American Psychological Association, 1993; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1993; Slaby et al., 1995). Garbarino (1991) has compared the effect of violence on children as similar to the effects of war associated with some Vietnam veterans and children living in war-torn countries. The characteristics of post-traumatic stress disorder include: sleep disturbances, inability to concentrate, flashbacks, images of terror, and nightmares. The effects inhibit all areas of development. Children experiencing abuse, domestic violence, and community or school violence are at risk for developing psychological disorders, grief and loss reactions, impaired intellectual development and school problems, truncated moral development pathological adaptation to violence, and identification with the aggressor (Craig,

1992; Garbarino et al., 1991; Wallack, 1993). Constant states of apprehension deplete the energy needed for learning. Energies are not available to learn trust, autonomy, and social competence, as well as academic skills. When the psychological development of children is impaired their abilities to focus on school work, engage in cooperative activities, and develop positive relationships is impaired.

To help resolve this epidemic of violence, schools have committed themselves to fulfilling the National Education Goals. Goal #1, "All children will start school ready to learn," and Goal #7, "Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning." To facilitate the achievement of these goals, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) adopted a position statement on violence in the lives of children in 1993. They stated that the cycles of violence in home, community, and school need to be simultaneously broken; children need to feel safe in order to learn. NAEYC proposes action focused on two major goals:

> 1. To decrease the extent of violence in all forms in children's lives by advocating for public policies and actions at the national level.
>
> 2. To enhance the ability of educators to help children cope with violence, and promote children's resilience, and assist families by improving professional practice in early childhood programs. (p. 81)

Consistent with Goal's 2000 and NAEYC's position is the American Psychological Association (APA), who support community/school collaboration that promotes individual

responsibility within families, communities, and schools. The APA is involved with ongoing research on programs addressing the disturbing and complicated problems of youth violence. Their research findings of 50 years provide some guidelines for the use of intervention programs. The APA recommends the following criteria for intervention programs:

1. include an understanding of developmental and sociocultural risk factors that lead to antisocial behavior;
2. include theory-based intervention strategies with known effectiveness in changing behavior, tested program designs, and validated objective measurement techniques to assess outcomes;
3. begin as early as possible;
4. address aggression as part of a constellation of antisocial behaviors in the child or youth;
5. multiple components reinforce each other across the child's everyday social contexts: family, school, peer groups, media, and community;
6. take advantage of developmental windows of opportunity.

Many schools are working to provide safe school environments by beginning comprehensive programs focused on the promotion of peace and non-violence in the school setting offering alternative perceptions and new skills, such programs provide resources for children and families. Teachers are being trained in methods and strategies that offset the negative effects of violence in the lives of children and support the development of more appropriate social skills.

Not unlike many schools, Peaceable School Initiative in Peaceable Magnet School began with the observance of a planned multi-county wide Violence Prevention Week in the fall of the

school year. Many of the teachers wanted their students to become involved in activities which would bring about an awareness or change in behavior. Additionally, during the summer, several teachers and the assistant principal attended a Peer Mediation training workshop sponsored by the District. The Peer Mediation program showed teachers how to empower students to handle their own minor problems without adult intervention. These two initiatives were brought together and a new entity was born, entitled the Peaceable School Initiative.

Once the Peaceable School Initiative was launched, teachers began planning activities for the remaining months of the year with each grade level responsible for a particular month. Activities were chosen based on their cross-curricular appeal and comprehensively involved students, staff, parents, and community. Activities included; wearing student designed logos and class "peace" colors, beginning the day with "peace" thoughts read over the intercom, creation of a "peace" chain from kindness links, use of children's literature with "peace" themes, and creation of a world "peace" quilt (each grade researched a different country and made a square with the word "peace" in the primary language for that country - the quilt now hangs in the main entrance of the school). The first group of peer mediators and their teachers created a fine arts presentation performed at an all-school assembly. This was so well received that it has continued to expand. It now includes many interested students and is in high demand for presentation to other schools and community group.

At the end of the first year, all teachers and staff reported that they felt they had observed a difference in the attitude and behaviors of students as they discussed and explored "peace." It is at this point that data for this research was collected to provide additional information for the

faculty at Peaceable Magnet School as they continued to pursue their goal of creating a safer more peaceful school environment.

3 Method

This study involved 42 Kindergarten through eighth grade teachers in classrooms averaging 25 students. Peaceable Magnet School was in a metropolis setting of approximately 400,000 people. The 750 children enrolled in K-8, came from throughout the entire city of 115,000 people. Peaceable Magnet School had a high incidence of students (approximately 80%) from low-income families. As a magnet school, there was strong emphasis in the performing and fine arts.

Researchers used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to assess the learning environment, as advocated by Tobin and Fraser (1998). Initially, three teachers on the "peaceable" task force and the assistant principal were interviewed about their views on what they were doing to promote peace and how they perceived the effects. Based on the results of these interviews, it was decided that a school survey would be conducted and analyzed. Results of the survey were shared with faculty at a workshop. In their efforts to continue developing curriculum to support a peaceful school environment, teachers used the survey results to create action plans.

3.1 *School Environment Assessment*

Peaceable Magnet School teachers were asked to complete the *School-Level Environment Questionnaire* (SLEQ) (Fisher & Fraser, 1991). Based partially on Rudolph Moos's (1991) research in various work environments, the SLEQ was designed to assess his three general psychosocial dimensions of Relationship, Personal Development, and System Maintenance/System Change. The SLEQ has two scales (Student Support and Affiliation) that measure Relationship

Dimensions, one scale (Professional Interest) that measures Personal Development, and five scales (Staff Freedom, Participatory Decision Making, Innovation, Resource Adequacy and Work Pressure) that measure System Maintenance and System Change. The 56 items on each form (actual and preferred) have a five-point response format. Scoring for 27 of the 56 items ranged from 5 for Strongly Agree to 1 for Strongly Disagree, and 29 items were scored using an opposite scale --1 for Strongly Agree to 5 for Strongly Disagree.

As noted by Fisher and Fraser (1990 & 1991), the SLEQ allows for assessment of subtle aspects of teachers' professional lives such as work pressure, affiliation and staff freedom. Reliability and validity for the SLEQ have been established with three samples from Australian Schools. Table I clarifies the meaning of the eight scales by providing scale descriptions and sample items. Questionnaires were distributed to a faculty of 42 with a 100 percent response rate. Once questionnaires were returned, aggregated scores were figured, averages calculated, significance determined and profiles developed.

TABLE I

Description of scales in the SLEQ

Name of scale	Description of scales	Sample item
Student support	There is good rapport between teachers and students, and students behave in a responsible self-disciplined manner.	Most students are helpful and cooperative to teacher. (+)
Affiliation	Teachers can obtain assistance, advice and encouragement and are made to feel accepted by colleagues.	I feel accepted by other teachers. (+)
Professional interest	Teachers discuss professional matters, show interest in their work and seek further professional development.	Teachers avoid talking with each other about teaching and learning. (-)
Staff freedom	Teachers are free to set rules, guidelines and procedures, and of supervision to ensure rule compliance.	I am not expected to conform to a particular teaching style. (+)
Participatory decision making	Teachers have the opportunity to participate in decision making.	I have to refer even small matters to a senior member of staff for a final answer. (-)
Innovation	The school is in favor of planned change, experimentation, classroom openness and individualization.	Teachers are encouraged to be innovative in this school. (+)
Resource adequacy	Support personnel, facilities, finance, equipment and resources are suitable and adequate.	The supply of equipment and resources is inadequate. (-)
Work pressure	The extent to which work pressure dominates the school environment.	Teachers have to work long hours to complete all their work. (+)

Items marked with a (+) are scored 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively for the responses Strongly Agree, Agree, Neith Agree nor Disagree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Items designated (-) are scored in the reverse manner. On or invalid responses are scored 3.

3.2 *Interpretive Research Methodology*

Results of the SLEQ were shared with Peaceable Magnet School faculty at a workshop. The three areas of greatest statistical difference were the focus of the workshop. Faculty formed 12 groups according to grade level with the performing and fine arts people in their own groups. Groups were to prioritize the three dimensions found to have the greatest statistical difference into a first, second, and third category determined by importance. Each group then brainstormed possible suggestions for improvement in the category selected as most important and developed an action plan. Once each group developed their action plan, they proceeded to create a visual metaphor illustrating what they hoped would be the end result. Action plans and visual metaphors were then shared and given to the Task Force Committee to be used as a guide for the continuation of the Peaceable School Initiative.

During the next school year a follow-up interview of the assistant principal was conducted to determine what parts of the Action Plans were implemented.

4. Findings From Quantitative Methods

The results of the SLEQ were used by Peaceable Magnet School teachers to create an Action Plan that would assist them as they continued in their efforts to improve the school environment. Actual and Preferred mean scores for each sub-scale were as follows respectively: Student Support, 21.79 & 28.38 (Mean difference of 6.59); Affiliation, 29.12 & 30.31 (Mean difference 1.19); Professional Interest, 26.83 & 28.86 (Mean difference 2.02); Staff Freedom, 23.69 & 23.69 (Mean difference 0.0); Participatory Decision Making, 23.93 & 25.98 (Mean difference 2.04); Innovation, 25.0 & 27.62 (Mean difference 2.61); Resource Adequacy, 21.43 & 28.02 (Mean difference 6.59); and Work Pressure 24.48 & 20.38 (-4.09). The results shown in

Table II indicate that the mean differences of six of the eight sub-scales were statistically significant (df 41, p<. 05).

TABLE II

Differences between scores on actual and preferred versions of SLEQ for teachers at Peaceable Magnet School (N = 42)

Scale	Means		SD		Mean Difference	*t*
	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Preferred		
Student support	21.79	28.38	6.57	6.92	6.595	3.762*
Affiliation	29.12	30.31	3.72	3.68	1.190	1.587
Professional interest	26.83	28.86	3.43	4.12	2.024	2.253*
Staff freedom	23.69	23.69	4.23	3.26	0.000	0.000
Participatory decision making	23.93	25.98	4.00	4.15	2.048	2.180*
Innovation	25.00	27.62	3.91	4.60	2.619	2.722*
Resource adequacy	21.43	28.02	6.32	7.09	6.595	3.966*
Work pressure	24.48	20.38	4.76	5.12	-4.095	-3.050*

*$p < 0.05$

The profile shown in Figure 1 reveals the three dimensions having the greatest statistical difference between actual and preferred means; Student Support, Resource Adequacy, and Work Pressure. The dimensions having the closest mean scores were Staff Freedom, Affiliation, and Professional Interest.

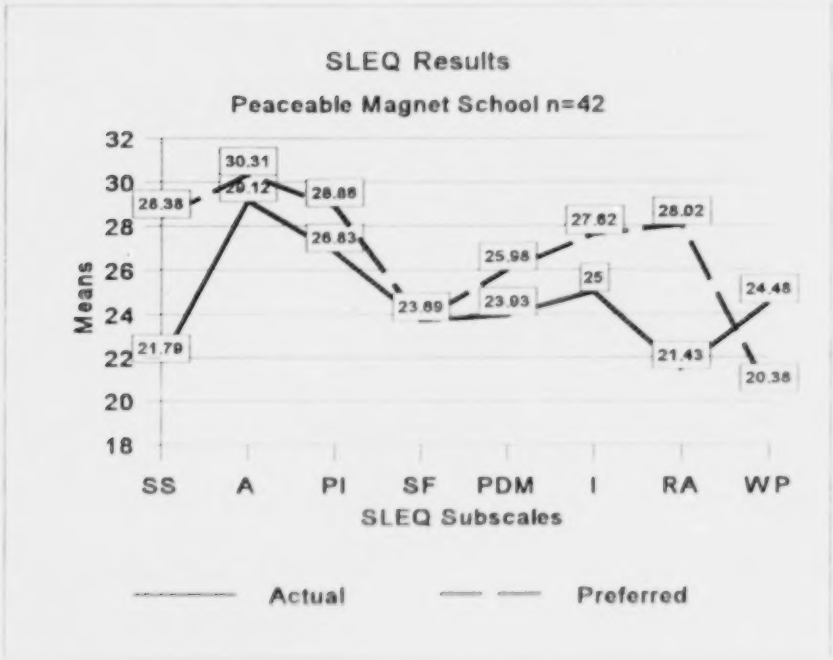

Figure 1. Profiles of mean school environment scores on the SEQ for Peaceable Magnet School teachers

5. Findings From Interpretive Methods

Once teachers had opportunity to discuss their own perspectives on the SLEQ results they began prioritizing the three areas of greatest concern and created action plans. Upon interviewing the assistant principal the researchers were able to identify what progress was made following the SLEQ workshop.

5.1 *Workshop Results*

By far, the dimension ranked as highest priority was that of Student Support with 10 of the 12 groups placing it first, which is consistent with the findings of the SLEQ. The other two dimensions, Work Pressure and Resource Adequacy, were ranked second and third respectively

with five of the 12 groups placing Work Pressure second and five of the 12 placing Resource Adequacy as third. Some groups did not prioritize, but chose to focus their energies on Student Support only.

Results of the action plans were primarily consistent with the Peaceable School Initiative and had several doable suggestions. Following are the teachers' suggestions to improve Student Support listed according to the frequency (most to least) in which they appeared on the different plans:

Consistency in disciplinary actions
Establish rapport with students
(specific suggestions included - activities outside of class, take time to listen, collaboration at grade levels, give compliments, use humor, & overlook minor infractions)
Parent involvement
Student set own goals
Survey student interests
Teach manners/social skills/ etiquette
School uniforms
Teachers agree philosophically on discipline
Parent shadowing
Modeling
Routine & structure
Developmentally appropriate activities
(after school activities & study groups)
Full time counselor
Student volunteer hours
Student of the week
Point system for discipline

Although most plans had positive solutions, two plans had negative suggestions that were in contradiction to the goals of the Peaceable School Initiative. These suggestions were to "get rid of certain individuals," and to reinstate "corporal punishment." Also mentioned were "detentions" which could be placed in either category depending on the protocol for utilizing

them. Of the sixteen suggestions, five dealt with discipline and student behavior; consistency in disciplinary actions, teaching manners/social skills/etiquette, teachers agree philosophically on discipline, parent shadowing, and point system for discipline.

5.2 *Follow-up Interview*

Results of the interview with Peaceable Magnet School assistant principal provided perspective on what was happening in fifth through eighth grades. Kindergarten through fourth grades were under the leadership of the school principal who we were unable to interview. The assistant principal responded to the suggestions made on the action plans (previously listed), relative to increased need for Student Support and indicated that they, "...definitely had movement in the area of Student Support and Resource Adequacy." Since the suggestions on the action plans were heavily focused on discipline and student behavior, one could expect the results of the interview to be similarly focused. Not only was discipline addressed directly on the corresponding suggestions, it also entered the picture when the assistant principal addressed student rapport and students setting their own goals.

Relative to the consistency of disciplinary action, the assistant principal felt that there was a problem in how things were handled between the two levels housed in the school. The indication was that there were significant inconsistencies in the disciplinary procedures followed in the K- 4th setting as compared to the 5th - 8th setting. The assistant principal reported that the upper grade teachers perceived this as being the root of some of the behavior problems experienced when students transitioned from the lower to the upper grades. Peaceable Magnet School has several programs in place to support students in the area of discipline and behavior. Those discussed include; a discipline committee that meets regularly to problem solve issues

affecting the environment of the whole school such as flow of traffic and use of stairways, student leaders in the cafeteria that report to the assistant principal, report of plans to assist students receiving D's or F's, an in-school suspension program with a specific curriculum focused on decision making and manners, and parent shadowing as an option to suspension. Additionally, teachers work together to provide opportunities for student empowerment and leadership that include, cross-grade volunteering as readers and tutors, cafeteria table leaders, peer counselors, and giving back to the community by cleaning the environment and volunteering in nursing homes.

As our conversation progressed to establishing student rapport, it was stated that teachers regularly met by grade level to share ideas. The assistant principal stated, "...some of the things talked about were activities outside of class, such as taking time to listen, grade level collaboration , giving compliments, using humor, and overlooking minor infractions..." It is interesting to note that the focus turned from establishing student rapport to involving and welcoming parents into the school and student behavior at which time the assistant principal stated, "...we're still getting some resistance in that area..." I asked if the resistance was from parents or from teachers and the response was, "From teachers. We're still getting some resistance, as far as I can tell. The climate of the school is revealed to me when you see paper up against a window, that says to me, 'You know this is my area and I don't want anybody,' you know..." I sensed that this was a touchy area and made the suggestion that teachers could video tape children's activities (as they worked on projects and presented them), then check the tapes out as a way for parents to be included in their children's activities. This suggestion was immediately misinterpreted to mean video tape for disciplinary purposes which was revealed by

the following comment:

> Um, they're not opening up to that either so we're getting a little bit of resistance. They hear it and some teachers are saying, "Hey, that's a neat idea, that way I don't always have to defend myself with that parent." You know some of the 5th grade team is open to that, um, but yet we still get some of the other teachers that are not really willing.

And after clarification:

> Yeah, so we've mostly, we were looking at it for behavior kinds of issues.

As the interview progressed, it became apparent that the issues surrounding student behavior continued to be of great concern. While discussing student goal setting, the topics of authentic assessment and student led parent conferences were addressed. Here, the conversation again turned to student behavior, "...I think that right now we have a lot of teachers who would feel threatened..." and continuing "...I think this year that what we were able to establish was that the bar was raised, that students have to be accountable and that they can't keep blaming the teachers, that teachers can't blame the students."

The overriding concern of teachers is discipline and student behavior. Although the focus often seems to revolve in a negative cycle, the teachers at Peaceable Magnet School are working to create a more positive cycle in the development and support of student behaviors. For example, they took a traditionally negative three-day in-school suspension policy, and turned it into a more positive opportunity for students to learn to become more self-desciplined. Following is the assistant principal's description of the three-day suspension program:

> (The) committee of teachers put together three days of decision making ... things on manners, things on making choices... so all that three day program is mapped out with tapes and different activities that they (students) have to do. They cannot complete that three day process until they've completed all those activities and it's timed. I mean we've timed the day out from 8:30 to 3:30 and we know how long

it should take them to do each activity and it's a lot.

Other student focused opportunities are imbedded in the curriculum through a program called Special Election classes. Students take eight classes per year that could include; peer coaching, leadership, computers, student ambassadors, Unlocking Your Potential, and DARE to name a few. The assistant principal explained the Special Election classes:

> They rotate every nine weeks and then within that nine weeks they have a Tuesday/Thursday class and a Monday/Wednesday/Friday class... programing is set up by grade level so in other words sixth graders would have a different core of those rotating classes than the seventh grade students would have. So as they move, each grade level is gonna get a different set of each set of classes.

In Peaceable Magnet School , teachers and students have worked to make their school environment more positive and more peaceful. They have not arrived at the safest school environment yet, but are in the process. They started laying a new foundation with a week of activities and have continued for three years to create new programs in the curriculum, extended to the community and have worked to become more open with parents. Although it is established that increased academic achievement and productive behavior come with positive teacher-student relationships (Jones & Jones, 1998), the teachers seem to be struggling with the positive and negative approaches in dealing with student behavior. Peaceable Magnet School teachers have focused on enhancing those relationships and have established that they see value in addressing the affective side of the child.

6. Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to assess subtle aspects of the school environment in a school that had integrated peace activities in the curriculum as a means of increasing awareness of peace and promoting positive changes in behavior. Issues of what Peaceable

Magnet School teachers believed were vital factors in developing a peaceful school environment were discussed using three dimensions of the *School Level Environmental Questionnaire* (SLEQ) - Student Support, Resource Adequacy, and Work Pressure. After discussing the SLEQ results, the majority of teachers prioritized Student Support as the area of greatest concern.

Although Peaceable Magnet School had been focusing on peace for the previous year with teachers and students reporting they felt an increased awareness as well as improved behavior, the results of the SLEQ and the development of action plans indicated that there were still serious concerns and a lack of student support. The majority of the action plans had positive doable suggestions that were consistent with the Peaceable School Initiative. Only two action plans had suggestions that contradicted the Peaceable School Initiative. The interview with the assistant principal indicated that different programs were in place to address a variety of issues in grades five through eight, but that teachers were still reluctant to involve parents as partners due to student behavior problems and a fear of being blamed. The resounding theme resulting from this research was the grave concern that teachers still have about student behavior even after two and a half years of focusing concerted effort on promoting peace.

Future research should involve administration of the SLEQ as a post-test to examine the continued progress of the Peaceable School Initiative and to provide additional information in developing and implementing action plans. Additionally, data should be collected to better understand the relationship of what teachers believe about discipline and what they do for discipline relates to promoting peace in a place called school.

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